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# HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE  
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Thursday, February 1, 1945

## ANNOUNCING A CHANGE

Beginning next week, Homemakers' Chats will come to you in a new dress - a stream-lined model of two pages of shorter stories with an occasional longer story. The Chats will be mailed daily instead of once a week and they'll be for release upon receipt. They'll continue to appear on the traditional pink sheets. Your comments and suggestions will be appreciated.

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SUBJECT: Judging Fabric Quality...Information from the textile specialists of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Who holds the purse strings? Well we women do a greater part of the buying here in the United States. And patriotic women buy only essentials these days. That goes for you and me and most of our friends.

When we do set out shopping...though...our choice of many things is limited. War has cut the production of a number of items. Take fabrics...for example. The textile industry has converted a large part of its production for war uses. And we find less textile goods nowadays than we used to.

So naturally what fabrics we buy we want to last. That's why it pays to know what we're getting whether we're looking for a dress, a yard of cloth, a sheet or a shirt. The textile specialists of the United States Department of Agriculture have studied the matter of judging fabrics and they note certain things you can tell about fabric quality when you buy.

You can tell how firm...how sturdy...a weave is in a piece of material. And firm weaves wear longest... Most of the time, they keep their shape better, shrink less, pull less at the seams and can generally be used longer than the looser weaves.

First step in testing firmness of a weave is to hold the cloth up to a strong light. Notice the yarns...those going up and down and those going across. They



should be uniformly spun...not lumpy and bumpy in some places and skinny in others. Each yarn should be about the same size as the next one. They should be evenly spaced in the weave design...and you should be able to see only a tiny pinhole of light between them. So far...so good.

Next try to shift the yarns. Take the cloth between your thumbs and first fingers and pull gently. Do this both lengthwise and crosswise. If the yarns shift easily or the fabric gets puffy in places...you'll find it'll pull easily along the stitching lines.

Finally...look at the cut edges of the material. If you're buying a ready made dress, look at the seams. The amount of fraying is often a sign of looseness of weave. This isn't a sure test...however...as a piece of material could fray badly because of the fabric it's made from rather than because of the weave. Also, fraying may not show up until after the material is washed. Sizing could hold the yarns in place and only after that sizing is washed out will the ends fray.

But the light test and the pulling test are two sure ways to tell about the firmness of the weave. You'll also want to know if your fabric will fade.

Not long ago, I heard an older homemaker telling a young one to soak her new housedress in cold water before she washed it. "It'll help set the color," she explained.

Unfortunately, that is not true. Once a fabric is dyed, nothing will set the color. Not soaking in cold water nor soaking in a solution of vinegar, salt or sugar of lead.

"But", I asked the textile specialists, "how can I know I'm getting a serviceably dyed fabric then?"

Here's what they told me. Vat dyes are best for cotton. These dyes are developed right on the fiber and they become a part of it. They're fast to washing, light, acids, alkalies and in some cases, to bleaches.

All right. But how can we tell whether a piece of cloth we're about to get was vat dyed or not? Well...try ravelling a yarn from the material. Look at it



closely. If you see white or light spots on the yarn at regular intervals, the fabric was pieced dyed and you can expect it to fade.

If there aren't any light spots on the yarn...then untwist it. The center of the fibers may be white or light colored. That means the yarn itself was dyed. But when all the fibers in the yarn are the same, even color...they you can know the dyeing was done before the spinning of the yarn.

The best way to be sure of color is to get cloth with a color guarantee on the label. Sometimes even so-called "color fast" materials fade...but the chances are they won't lose as much color as the fabrics that carry no statement about color-fastness.

One more point about judging fabric quality. Have you ever had a piece of cotton material shrink? If you have, you know that shrinkage can ruin a dress or blouse or anything else. But how can a person tell whether or not, or how much, a piece of cotton material will shrink when it's wahed?

Here's where a label comes in again. The label should not only tell that the fabric has been given one of the commercial shrinkage treatments...but it should also say how much more the material can be expected to draw up. Few cotton materials are completely shrunk in the commercial processes.

The label might read, "Preshrunk...will not shrink more than one percent under Commercial Standard CS59-36." Sounds technical...doesn't it, But it means that the cloth will not shrink more than three-fourths of an inch in a yard. That'd mean your skirt would be about a half to three-fourths an inch shorter after it was washed.

A manufacturer isn't required to label his goods as preshrunk. But if he does, the label must tell how much more you can expect the material to shrink. So when I come across a piece of cotton goods that isn't labeled preshrunk...with the amount the material can be expected to draw up further, I take for granted that it'll shrink...and shrink quite a bit...when it's washed.

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